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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 LAGOS 000563

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TAGS: [PGOV](#) [PREL](#) [PINR](#) [PHUM](#) [KDEM](#) [NI](#)

SUBJECT: NIGERIA: SOUTH TENSE AS POLITICAL VIOLENCE RISES

REF: A. ABUJA 00448

[1](#)B. ABUJA 00449

[1](#)C. LAGOS 504

[1](#)D. LAGOS 505

Classified By: CONSUL GENERAL ROBYN HINSON-JONES. REASON: 1.5 (B & D)

[1](#)1. (C) SUMMARY. Southern civic and media groups have diverse views of the coming elections, ranging from optimistic anticipation of leadership change to fear of ruthless power tactics. Some analysts predict "bloody" elections in Kwara and the South-South states, but relative calm in Lagos and elsewhere. Across the South, the increasing frequency and prominence of apparent political assassinations has heightened the public's nervousness. None of the scenarios for violence include attacks against foreign nationals. END SUMMARY.

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SOUTHERN TENSIONS RISING; IMPUNITY REIGNS SUPREME  
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[1](#)2. (C) Beyond the on-going societal violence and extrajudicial killings, which result in corpses on the streets and in the lagoons or rivers of Lagos State, numerous prominent Nigerian citizens have been murdered in recent months. Southern Nigerians express universal horror at the murders, several of which have taken place in the victims' homes. While the 2001 case of felled Attorney General Bola Ige remains under prosecution, to date no suspects have been convicted for politically motivated murders in the post-1999 administration. Over a dozen such murders and additional reported attempted murders remain unsolved from the past two years. Whatever the reasons for the stunted administration of justice, many Nigerians view the GON as complacent toward or impotent against political violence in the South. Southern human rights groups have warned of a rise in violence since September 2002 that the number of deaths would surely rise as elections drew nearer. This sad prediction is being fulfilled, though the reasons behind the violence remain hazy.

[1](#)3. (C) Tensions in the South have increased steadily since last fall. Multiple sources accuse political leaders and their supporters of plotting various murders that have taken place under suspicious circumstances. Some candidates appear to be wearing bullet-proof vests. Sources attribute assassinations generally to one of two possible motives: a major "business deal gone bad" or a political vendetta. Ledum Mitee, president of the Movement for the Survival of the Ogoni People (MOSOP), says the motive itself is less important in explaining the phenomenon of these killings than the atmosphere of impunity they generate. The "real reason why it happens," he argues, is the "lack of accountability" combined with an "irrational instinct to dominate that comes with power." Political killings may occur if someone obsessed with power, or allies, views a person as an opponent's supporter. The target may not be the opponent directly. Some politicians are allegedly detaining opponents and critics with impunity. For example, Eni Akinsola of CDHR reports that authorities are repeatedly detaining polytechnic professor John Okam without charges, allegedly under orders by a member of the Cross River State House of Assembly.

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FORECAST: MORE VIOLENCE AHEAD  
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[1](#)4. (C) POLITICAL KILLINGS, THUGGERY, AND VIGILANTISM. In southern Nigeria, persons who initiate violence will usually appeal more to ethnic than to religious ties, most sources

agree. More dangerous than sporadic societal uprisings, some sources claim, are threats by hired thugs. Southern human rights NGOs expect political violence will continue to rise throughout the election season. Many see it as indisputable fact that some politicians recruit thugs to influence the outcome of elections or other political gatherings. Other politicians, failing to discourage criminal actions by their supporters who are seeking to maintain or gain power, passively permit such violence. Members of the Committee for the Defense of Human Rights (CDHR), including Eni Akinsola, Shina Loremikan, Belo Aideloje, and Ropo Ewenla, described first-hand experience they had in university when dominant military rulers paid friends to disrupt political and social meetings that could undermine the strongman's agenda. The same methods are used to affect political agendas in democracy today, they claim.

15. (C) ARMED STUDENTS TO TAKE TO THE STREETS. Contacts from CDHR, MOSOP, the Catholic Secretariat, and the Civil Liberties Organization continue to raise allegations with poloffs that some candidates actively recruit student "cultists" to join street armies and intimidate voters at the polls. Groups such as the Vikings in Rivers and Black Ax in Enugu are receiving funds in exchange for their "support." Arms are being stockpiled on university campuses, they claim. "Students will tell you, 'I'm for so-and-so,'" said CDHR's Eni Akinsola. "When you ask them, 'Why?' they'll tell you simply, 'He's my candidate.' You know what they mean. They have been paid."

16. (C) DEADLY PLACES TO WATCH? Akinsola and Chukwuma Ezeala, national coordinator of the Justice Development and Peace Commission (JDPC), predict that roughly half of Nigeria's states will be violent and half will be peaceful come elections. Kwara's capital of Illorin will be "one big pool of blood," they say. "Kwara is anybody's game: Lawal, Saraki, or Lai Mohammed." Rivers and Delta will also be "very bloody." Bayelsa and Cross River will have "problems." In Akwa Ibom, though the urban centers may be peaceful, the villages may endure the "worst potential violence." They expect violence in Ondo and Oyo "because the people there do not support the candidates they are bringing, and the PDP will win these states at all costs." Potential hotspots in the North include Kano, Kebbi, and especially Katsina, they believe. Kaduna and Plateau will be "dicey." Borno will be interesting because of the balanced strength of competing parties, they argue. Nassarawa may have skirmishes as well.

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TENTATIVE TRUCES AND "TRANSPARENT RIGGING"  
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17. (C) Lagos will be relatively peaceful, think Akinsola and Ezeala, because "the two factions of the OPC have agreed not to fight each other here." Representatives of these two organizations believe that the OPC may be involved in violence elsewhere, namely Kwara, but the police have "agreed to allow the OPC to participate in Lagos politics as long as no violence is involved." In Ogun, where the vote is being "more transparently rigged--no, 'allocated,'" voting will be relatively peaceful. Kogi "will be very peaceful, for the most part." In Niger, "the big-wigs won't allow their domains to deteriorate into violence." Ekiti "would have been a bloody tag team, but the four parties are not fighting each other now." Other states that will not experience "much" violence include Osun, Sokoto, Abia, Bauchi, Benue, Zamfara, Adamawa, and Gombe. Anambra will be violent, but to a lesser degree than the norm.

18. (C) RIGGING LEGITIMATELY: WHEN THEY'LL THROW IN THE TOWEL. "You need to have genuine support in order to rig an election," asserted Akinsola. "If you cross the 30 percent threshold of support, then you can rig it to get the mandate." Most rigging, according to Ledum Mitee of the Movement for the Survival of the Ogoni People (MOSOP), does not involve the literal "stuffing of the ballot box." The process is less definable than the outcome in some cases. How electoral officers are chosen and what they do with the resources they are given are important. Do they make voting materials available? Do they distribute fraudulent ballots? To combat rigging and increase the perceived legitimacy of election outcomes, several NGOs say, results should be announced on site by the local government offices, rather than passing the results all the way to Abuja for final announcement.

19. (C) COMMENT. Political fears in the South are largely by-products of societal clashes between indigenous groups (e.g. Warri, Delta State), alleged assassinations, and political legitimacy questions (as some candidates across the

South are reportedly "imposed" on voters without popular consent). Despite Obasanjo's popularity with many Southerners, his recent efforts to shore up political support have failed to convince people who feel that the GON has done little to engender economic development and social welfare, issues repeatedly highlighted as paramount to Southern constituents. The climate remains volatile in pockets across the South; moreover, tensions continue to riddle relationships between the international oil companies operating in the region and the local residents. The coincidence of tensions in the Middle East and domestic violence in Nigeria is thus making many an expat uncomfortable. Whatever election violence there may be in the South is not expected to involve foreign nationals, however. Prudence and common sense should help keep foreign nationals away from the election fray. END COMMENT.  
HINSON-JONES